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ABSTRACT

In 1996, a California high school district and two colleges assembled intersegmental teams to establish common assessment of college-readiness in mathematics and English. Subject area teams reviewed standards, rubrics, and current tests. A Joint Assessment Team (JAT) explored the Golden State Exam (GSE) in Written Composition as a common tool. Its format and scoring were similar to college assessments, and it was available statewide. In 1997, 250 high school students took the GSE. A holistic rubric was developed. Essays were read and scored, and data sets were matched. There was a strong correlation, which convinced the team to continue with the GSE. In 1998, 300 more essays were read and scored holistically and diagnostically. Holistic grades were correlated with GSE scores, yielding a strong correlation. In 1999, 3,300 high school juniors took the GSE. The correlation was still strong. Letters were sent to students with diagnostic feedback and GSE scores, noting the relevance for college placement. JAT implementation has had several positive effects in the school district. While the GSE has changed from year to year, it has remained a reliable instrument. (SM)

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Building for the Future Through Inter-Segmental Assessment

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The Problem

For years the California educational system has experienced a significant disparity between the skills higher education required of entering freshmen and the skills many of those students brought with them. Annual reports decried the percentage of new students sentenced to remedial classes in English and mathematics. The California State University even adopted a plan to reduce remedial students from fifty percent to ten percent by the year 2007.

Unfortunately, the data provided to local high schools came years after the students graduated and provided no diagnostic feedback. Consequently, the information was neither timely nor efficacious.

Program Background

In the fall of 1996, the Kern High School District, Bakersfield College, and California State University, Bakersfield, assembled inter-segmental teams to establish common assessment of college-readiness in mathematics and English language. Subject area teams met to review standards, rubrics, and current tests. The English program is the subject of this paper.

The Setting

The program's geography is currently defined by the boundaries of the Kern High School District. While expansion into other Kern County districts and CSUB/BC service areas is desired, it is not yet an accomplished fact.

The Kern High School District includes fourteen comprehensive high schools and many specialized schools. The population of the comprehensive schools ranges from less than 700 students to more than 2,750. The total 9-12 population of KHSD exceeds 28,000. As such, it is the primary feeder to both Bakersfield College and California State University, Bakersfield.

This large student population combined with relative geographic isolation has created an ideal situation for inter-segmental efforts. Indeed, there has been a long history of articulation among the three institutions, though usually in bilateral fashion. Since 1990, BC and CSUB have articulated a great deal of their respective curricula. While several faculty members work at both colleges, more systematic efforts were established to maintain common standards. Beyond articulation meetings, the schools shared common scoring sessions. Ultimately, the two schools decided that scores on placement tests would be mutually honored.

The Joint Assessment Team

The formation of the Joint Assessment Team in 1996 built on the work of BC and CSUB in defining and identifying quality writing. A team of English instructors from the three institutions met to review data and instruments currently available. While all three administrations actively supported the team, the instructors were the sole decision-makers.

After several months of collaborative study, the committee decided to explore the Golden State Exam in Written Composition as a common tool. The GSE was attractive because its format and scoring were similar to the college assessments, and it was available statewide. Should research indicate its utility, students from beyond the local area could also benefit.

Program History

Having settled on the GSE as the first choice, it was critical to explore the program's scoring patterns with those of the college and university. In the spring of 1997, more than 250 KHSD students took the exam. Copies of the responses were secured for future scoring. Meanwhile, the team developed a holistic rubric (Appendix A), which met the approval of all three agencies. This rubric used a six-point scale parallel to that used by the GSE. During the summer of 1997, the essays were read and scores recorded. When the state GSE scores arrived, the data sets were matched up and a correlation of .737 was calculated.

This strong correlation convinced the team to continue down the GSE path. Prior to GSE testing in 1998, work was completed on a diagnostic scoring model (Appendix B). In 1998, another 300 essays were read and scored both holistically and diagnostically. The holistic grades were again correlated with GSE scores yielding a coefficient of .723. Letters were sent to all participating students who were seniors the following fall. These letters indicated the areas of potential improvement in the students' writing.

In January of 1999, more than 3300 KHSD juniors took the GSE. Juniors were targeted in order to return feedback to both students and teachers early in the senior year. Only the long essay was considered for further study. A sample of 1221 essays was scored holistically while all were scored diagnostically. The resulting correlation of .641 was lower than in previous years, though still strong. GSE scores were again slightly lower than local JAT scores, a good thing for the continued support of collegiate faculty.

The fall 1999 letters to students included not only the diagnostic feedback, but the actual GSE score and an interpretation of its relevance to placement at BC or CSUB (Appendix C). Additionally, a duplicate copy of each student's report was provided to the senior English teacher along with copies of the scoring rubrics and an explanation of the Diagnostic Scoring Guide (Appendix D.)

The weakening of the correlation over the three years of the study may be due to several factors. Each scoring session was marked by somewhat different tests and slightly different scoring procedures. In 1997, the GSE consisted of two long essays. Both were read by JAT readers. Two readers scored the paper; non-adjacent scores were taken to third readers and adjacent scores were averaged. In 1998, the test changed to a long essay, a short essay, and a multiple-choice element. While the GSE score was mapped from all three elements, JAT only read the essays. That year, no score discrepancies were allowed, and all such papers were taken to multiple readers. In 1999, the JAT teams read only the long essay, roughly half the test. Adjacent scores were allowed to stand; third readings were only used to validate scoring patterns and resolve non-adjacent discrepancies.

In the fall of 1999, an additional element was added to the JAT process when 11th grade English teachers were invited to a sample scoring session. "Live" essay samples were taken from current students, and the JAT team supervised a day-long scoring. The day concluded with a critique of the process and suggestions for refining the rubrics and explanations. What had started as an "early-warning" test had become an inter-segmental in-service.

View from the High School

The implementation of JAT has had several positive effects in the KHSD. The existence of a commonly measured standard for college-bound writing has proven beneficial to administration, faculty, and students. Beyond the early holistic feedback, however, the diagnostic scoring has proven to be the salient benefit.

One of the main reasons for developing and implementing the entire JAT plan was to report the results of the exam to the high school students who wrote the exam. Without the information that the Diagnostic Scoring Guide afforded the students, the information reported by the Holistic Scoring Guide was just another score. When students received a GSE Certificate of Recognition, Honor, or High Honor, they also received a GSE/JAT Report that informed them of the areas upon which they could improve their writing according to the Diagnostic Scoring Guide. The real learning takes place when students sit down with teachers and discuss the points outlined on the GSE/JAT Report in conjunction with essay writing in general. When students are able to connect essay writing with the Diagnostic Scoring Guide, it becomes a powerful teaching tool.

The Diagnostic Scoring Guide has also become a powerful learning tool for the teachers themselves. Throughout the process of developing the guide, input from teachers at many school sites had to be considered. This was an impetus to get teachers thinking about diagnostic issues in conjunction with essay rating, grading, and assessment in general. Once a draft of the guide was completed, it was tested by the JAT committee before it was introduced to a larger group of teachers at an in-service. Thereafter, it was refined and drafted into a working assessment tool before being used as an actual diagnostic tool. Throughout this entire process, university, college, and high school instructors met, worked together, and learned from each other in order to produce the best guide possible.

The summer scoring sessions put the Diagnostic Scoring Guide to the test as both an assessment tool and a teaching/learning tool. English instructors from the three institutions (CSUB, BC, KHSD) came together to grade the selected GSE exams, and the instructors were able to communicate with one another about the writing process and the quality of the product it should yield. By the end of the sessions, the instructors all had a much better idea of how to use the Diagnostic Scoring Guide as an assessment tool and as a learning/teaching tool. At the end of the sessions, discussion is always held to determine how the guides can be made even better.

The Diagnostic Scoring Guide was first developed by the JAT committee as an assessment and feedback tool for the GSE essay exam. It has turned into much more than an assessment tool. The guide has now become an assessment/teaching/learning tool that helps both instructors and students. Students are becoming more aware of how they can become better writers. Instructors are discovering common ground to emphasize in the instruction of writing. The Diagnostic Scoring Guide has become a valuable tool for all involved in the writing process at the high school level.

View from the College and University

The most direct benefit to higher education is the luxury afforded by many students arriving pre-assessed, but the real import lies elsewhere. True, students who have mastered college-level writing skills need only test once to earn GSE recognition and to be placed in English courses at BC (see Appendix E) or CSUB, but those who do not score well are perhaps even better served. Students who have not mastered these skills receive diagnostic

feedback to help them better prepare for the standard placement test in their senior year. Successful testers will have a reduced testing load while unsuccessful students are given an opportunity to see specific feedback on their strengths and weaknesses in writing. So, this testing service serves all students–both those who are well prepared for college and those who are not.

While the GSE has changed from year to year, it has been found to be a reliable instrument. The holistic scores recorded by the state readers are a close match to the assessment standards at CSUB and BC and the scores awarded by our team of high school and college readers. When there is a difference, the state scores tend to be a bit more rigorous, but the students can always retest using the standard assessment test at either college if they are not satisfied with the GSE score. While the statistical data are encouraging, some English types are more comfortable with anecdotal data. In the initial year of the project, the BC representative looked up individual students who had taken both GSE and the BC writing exam. A remarkable consistency was noted, and the GSE score had placed students at an appropriate and successful level.

Beyond the obvious benefit to students, this assessment project furnishes the local 9-12 faculty various opportunities in our grading sessions to discuss standards and strategies for reaching the standards. No longer are the college standards a mystery to be solved, but a goal for us all to work toward. This project will ultimately raise the literacy level in the community and the inter-segmental benefits far outweigh any drawbacks encountered.

Future Program Design

With GSE becoming an anchor in the junior curriculum, the intent is to work the process down the grade levels. Reading GSE papers will continue only on a sampling basis to maintain the link to the college placement tests. The broader diagnostic reading will be moved to a local GSE-like sample taken at the end of the sophomore year with scoring throughout the summer. Juniors will return to school and receive specific recommendations to help them prepare for the GSE in January. Their January motivation will be enhanced by the tangible benefit of direct college placement should their score suffice.

As more students become involved in the GSE/JAT process, schools are better able to use these data to help guide students. One KHSD school doubled its enrollment in AP English after noting how many students were already writing at a level deemed strong by the university. The same school also increased enrollments in its senior composition course due to student demand to improve writing skills. Such indicators give hope that the JAT process will effect significant improvement in the writing skills of future Kern High School District graduates.

APPENDIX A

Holistic Scoring Guide

Circle your holistic score – and use the diagnostic scoring guide to identify problems in the writing sample.

Score of 6: Superior Essay
- Responsive to writing task
- Thoughtful and interesting development
- Coherently organized
- Effective, mature style
- Relatively free from errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics

Score of 5: Strong Essay
- Relatively responsive to writing task
- Fully developed
- Well organized
- Readable style
- Relatively free from errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics

Score of 4: Adequate Essay
- Generally responsive to writing task
- Adequately developed
- Clearly organized
- Some sense of style
- Some errors in sentence structure, usage, and/or mechanics

Score of 3: Mediocre Essay (has one of more of the following problems)
- Limited understanding of the writing task
- Inadequate development
- Unclear organization
- Limited control of syntax and language
- Numerous errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics

Score of 2: Weak Essay (has one or more of the following problems)
- Inadequate understanding of the topic and writing task
- Underdeveloped
- Weak organization
- Inadequate control of syntax and language
- Numerous and varied errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics

Score of 1: Incompetent Essay (has one or more of the following problems)
- Misunderstanding of topic and writing task
- Little or no development
- Disorganized and incoherent
- Little or no control of syntax and language
- Serious and varied errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics

APPENDIX B

Diagnostic Scoring Guide

In this guide you will find numbers to correspond with common problems found in student writing. In addition to giving the essay a holistic score (see the Holistic Scoring Guide), use these numbers to identify areas for improvement. On the following pages are examples and explanations corresponding to each of the numbered categories.

Write these numbers under the circled holistic score.

Response to the Question

1. **understanding the topic**
2. **awareness of audience**

Development

3. **support (evidence)**
4. **focus**
5. **repetition**

Organization

6. **thesis**
7. **coherence/logic**
8. **expository essay form**

Style

9. **sentence variety**
10. **transitions**
11. **vocabulary**
12. **appropriate language (level of diction, slang, clichés, jargon, idioms)**
13. **wordiness**

Correctness

14. **spelling**
15. **confused words/modifier forms**
16. **punctuation**
17. **sentence structure/syntax**
18. **verb forms (including subject/verb agreement, tense)**
19. **noun/adjective forms**
20. **pronoun usage**

APPENDIX C

Student Letter

Date: October 15, 1999

To:

Stockdale High School

From: Paul Hoagland, Director
Research & Planning

Last year you took the Golden State Exam in Written Expression. This test can award state honors, but is also honored as the English writing placement test at both BC and CSUB. Papers were scored 1-6. Scores of 5 and 6 indicate full readiness for college-level writing. Scores of 1-4 indicate ranges of improvement needed this important senior year. Your score was 2.

As a further service to you, your essay was read by a joint team of college and high school instructors to identify areas in which you can strengthen your writing in preparation for college. Papers were evaluated for effectiveness in the following areas:

Response to the Question:	understanding the topic, awareness of audience
Development:	support, focus, repetition
Organization:	theses, coherence/logic, expository essay form
Style:	sentence variety, transitions, vocabulary, appropriate language (level of diction, slang, cliches, jargon, idioms), wordiness
Correctness:	spelling, confused words/modifier forms, punctuation, sentence structure/syntax, verb forms and pronoun usage

According to the evaluation you can strengthen your writing in the following areas:

spelling
confused words
punctuation
sentence structure
verb forms

We hope you will find this information helpful in working towards your educational goals. Your English teacher is an invaluable resource in strengthening your writing.

APPENDIX D

Diagnostic Scoring Guide – Examples/explanations

1. **understanding the topic**
   The essay's thesis and development show that the student understands the essay prompt.

2. **awareness of audience**
   The essay is directed toward its intended audience, in this case evaluators from high schools, colleges, and universities. While the essay needn't be formal, getting too personal, chatty, or colloquial is not recommended.

3. **support (evidence)**
   The essay should have enough relevant and specific supporting evidence to develop its paragraphs. Generalities and vague details do not constitute good support.

4. **focus**
   The supporting material in the paragraphs of the essay should relate specifically to the thesis statement, and the writer should maintain a balance between specific detail and analysis.

5. **repetition**
   When a sentence or paragraph contains the same words and ideas more than once, the essay's development may suffer although repetition may also be used for stylistic effect.

6. **thesis**
   The essay must have a clearly written thesis statement. Typically this statement appears in the introductory paragraph; however, an accomplished writer may succeed in delaying the thesis or using an implied thesis.

7. **coherence/logic**
   The thesis statement and supporting evidence should follow logically and form a coherent argument.

8. **expository essay form**
   The essay should contain a clearly written thesis statement and be divided into adequately developed paragraphs with an identifiable topic. Overall, the essay should have a discernible plan.

9. **sentence variety**
   The essay should contain a variety of simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. The writer should also vary the beginnings of his/her sentences.

10. transitions

The writer should use transitional sentences and devices between ideas and paragraphs to allow them to flow into one another smoothly. However, the writer should avoid the use of repetitive and formulaic transitional devices.

11. vocabulary

Keeping the audience in mind, the writer should use vocabulary appropriate to the level and purpose of the writing and include words other than those used in common colloquial situations.

12. appropriate language (level of diction, slang, clichés, jargon, idioms)

Writers should use standard diction, including appropriate prepositions and articles. The essay should only use slang, jargon, and clichés for effect. In this case, the writer should put these expressions in quotation marks to acknowledge their use. Furthermore, writers should avoid using vague words such as "thing" and "everything."

13. wordiness

Economy within sentences is usually most effective. "Padding" of any sort makes prose wordy and difficult to follow.

14. spelling

This category includes all misspellings.

15. confused words/modifier forms

This category should be designated if the writer confuses words such as affect/effect, too/to/two, its/it's, their/there/they're, less/fewer, etc.

16. punctuation

Writers should follow the basic conventions of English punctuation. Specifically, a grasp of standard comma rules should be clear in the essay:

If they study, they will do well. (dep. clause, ind. clause)
They write well, and they read well. (ind. clause, coord. conj. ind. clause)
Reading, writing, and speaking . . . (items in a series)
Bakersfield, California (city, state)

The semicolon, if used, should separate independent clauses:

They study hard; they do well. (ind. clause ; ind. clause)

Apostrophes in possessive forms and in contractions should be used correctly:

the student's essay/the man's hat (singular possessive)
the students' essays/the people's choice (plural possessive)
don't/can't (contractions)

Apostrophes should not be used to form plurals or the singular verb form.

Quotation marks should be used correctly:

"Who are they?"
He put real emphasis on the word "they."
"I write quite well," the student boasted.

End punctuation should be used appropriately.
Doubling and tripling end punctuation marks is not necessary.

17. sentence structure/syntax

Writers should avoid fragments and run-ons and use parallel structure correctly.
These examples show typical errors:

Because students must be able to write well. (frag. – dep. clause)
The young lady wearing the pretty dress. (frag. – noun phrase)
We write essays we read literature. (fused sent. – needs , conjunction)
We write essays, we read literature. (comma splice – needs , conjunction)
She loves to read, to write, and speaking. (faulty parallelism – *to speak* – not *speaking)*

18. verb forms (subject/verb agreement, tense)

Writers should make sure that their verbs agree with their subjects and that their verb forms and tenses are correct and consistent.
These examples show typical errors:

The student with her friends watch a movie. (*watches* – student is the subject)
Jobs is what teenagers need. (*are* – jobs is the subject)

A good writer does not shift verb tense:

I was reading, and he plays his stereo. (*played* – remain in past tense)

Correct verb forms must be used:

They should of seen the movie. *(should have* – "of" is not a verb)
We seen the movie yesterday. *(saw* or *have seen)*

19. noun/adjective forms

Writers should make sure that their noun and adjective forms are correct.
Plural noun forms: man/men, woman/women
Adjective forms: good, better, best; quick, quicker, quickest
Writers should not confuse adjective and adverb forms:
bad, badly; good, well; many, much
Noun/adjective combinations should be done correctly.
our lives, not *our life*

20. pronoun usage

Pronoun shifts (from third to second person, or from singular to plural, for example) should be avoided.
Vague pronoun use, such as the use of "it" and "that" and other pronouns without clear
antecedents, should be avoided.
Overuse and vague use of "you" should be avoided.
These examples show some typical errors:
Pronouns should agree with their antecedents:

If a person writes well, they will succeed. (*he or she* – not they)

Reflexive and intensive pronouns should be used correctly:

The group consisted of him, her, and myself. (*me* – not *myself)*
I, myself, would not go with them. (*myself* – correct intensifier)

I thought silently to myself. (*myself* – correct reflexive)

Pronouns should be written in the correct case.

who/whom

The drug dealers who the police arrest often do not serve time. (*whom* – correct case)

APPENDIX E

Special Placement in English Composition

Name _____ SS# _____

Current Placement Level _____ Change level to _____ ESL: ❒ Yes ❒ No

High School Graduate: ❒ Yes ❒ No Year of High School Graduation _____

Reason for change to English 1A (06):

- ❒ Counselor determination on the basis of College Board Advanced Placement Program (3,4,5 on Language and Composition or Composition and Literature exams).
- ❒ Score of 600 or above on the College Board SAT II or Achievement Test in English composition with essay.
- ❒ Score of 550 (score of 470 prior to 4/95) or above on verbal section of SAT/SAT 1 (plus a score of 10, 11, or 12 on the English Placement Essay written at BC).
- ❒ Score of 22 or above on ACT English Usage Test (plus a score of 10, 11, or 12 on the English Placement Essay written at BC).
- ❒ CSUB English 110 placement on the ETP (total score of 155-180 for CSU System which must include essay).
- ❒ Score of 5 or 6 on the English component of the GSE exam (recorded on high school transcript).
- ❒ English 1A placement on the UC Subject A Exam.
- ❒ Completion of an introductory writing course equivalent to English 1 at another accredited college (with a grade of C or better).
- ❒ Meets criteria indicated below under multiple measures.
- ❒ Other _____

Reason for change to English 1 (05):

- ❒ CSUB English 100 placement on the EPT (total score of 147-154 which must include essay).
- ❒ Score of 4 on the English component of the GSE exam (recorded on the high school transcript).
- ❒ Completion of basic skills writing course equivalent to English 60 at another accredited college (with a grade of C or better).
- ❒ Meets criteria indicated below under multiple measures.
- ❒ Other _____

Reason for change to English 60 (04):

- ❒ Completion of a developmental writing course equivalent to Academic Development 68 at another accredited college (with a grade of C or better).
- ❒ Meets criteria indicated below under multiple measures.
- ❒ Other _____

Multiple Measures Criteria

- ❒ Has met high school cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher
  AND must meet two out of three of the following criteria...
- ❒ Three to four years of high school English.
- ❒ Education plans include transfer to a four-year college.
- ❒ Full-time enrollment (12 or more units per semester).

_____ _____

Counselor Signature **Date**

White–Counseling Yellow–English Department Pink–Student

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